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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 CONAKRY 000500

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SUBJECT: UNIONS DIVIDED ON POLITICAL STRATEGY

REF: CONAKRY 0448

Classified By: A/DCM SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Pessimistic but hoping for peace, union leader Rabiattou's comments during a September 3 meeting with A/DCM suggests that she does not have a clear idea of a strategy to achieve change in the face of what she is convinced will be fraudulent elections. Continued divisions both between and within individual unions appear to have undermined the support and influence of the Unions-Intersyndicale, making them more of a marginal player in Guinea's current political dynamic. However, despite their relative decline in influence, the unions could still serve as a catalyst for a broader civil movement in the months to come. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On September 3, A/DCM met with Mme Serah Rabiattou Diallo, Secretary General of the National Confederation of Guinean Workers (CNTG) and co-chair of the broader union coalition, the Unions-Intersyndicale. Her co-leader, Dr. Ibrahima Fofana of the Union of Guinean Workers (USTG) was also supposed to be in the meeting, but showed up at the Embassy gate just as the meeting was coming to a close. Rabiattou said dismissively of Fofana "he's always late, you can't control him." Continuing the trend of previous meetings over the last several months, Rabiattou conveyed a largely pessimistic view of Guinea's political situation.

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REACTIONS TO CALL FOR IMPEACHMENT  
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¶3. (C) Referring to a public statement made earlier this month in which Rabiattou declared the president unfit for office and demanded his impeachment (reftel A), A/DCM asked whether the unions had been subject to any political backlash. Rabiattou said that most of the political parties had privately congratulated her, as had several civil society representatives. However, she said the Minister of Defense told her that her statement was much too harsh and she needed to "tone it down." The Minister of Reconciliation reportedly told her something along the same lines. Rabiattou said that neither the Supreme Court nor the National Assembly have reacted to the statement despite the fact that she demanded that these institutions initiate impeachment proceedings as provided for by Guinean law.

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NO HOPE FOR ELECTIONS  
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¶4. (C) Rabiattou was convinced that Guinea will not be able to hold free and fair, transparent legislative elections given the current political climate. According to Rabiattou, the recent spate of presidential appointments represents the ruling PUP's (Party for Unity and Progress) return to power. She pointed out that many of the new appointees are simply

corrupt officials recycled from previous administrations. Rabiadou added that the president has employed the same strategy in previous elections - just as everything appears to be advancing in a transparent way, "he sweeps in and starts replacing key officials with PUP loyalists." Later, she said that senior PUP party members are currently traveling throughout the country to meet with the patriarchs of influential families. "They will remind them that it is the PUP that feeds them and then those families will not vote against the PUP, in deference to their elders," she said.

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NO STRIKES, PLEASE  
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15. (C) According to Rabiadou, the unions received a letter from Prime Minister Souare on September 3 in which he requested that the unions consider refraining from labor strike activity through the end of 2008. She said that the unions would be meeting on September 4 to discuss the request. Rabiadou said that unionists want peace just like everyone else and are not necessarily against such an agreement. She added that it would be a big risk for unions to strike now given the socio-economic context. "People cannot afford a strike, let alone the potential for violence," she said. However, Rabiadou warned that individual unions continue to consider targeted labor strikes including in the health and mining sectors, and possibly in the education sector later in the year if the GoG does not follow through on certain promises.

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THE POPULATION WILL REACT  
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16. (SBU) Expounding on the country's economic difficulties, Rabiadou said that many people now cannot afford basic necessities, a problem that will likely be exacerbated by the financial demands of the holy month of Ramadan. According to Rabiadou, civil servants did not receive their July salary payment until August 25 (normally due July 31), and they have yet to receive their salaries for August. "People are living on nothing," she said.

17. (C) Rabiadou repeatedly said that if nothing changes, the population will be forced to react. A/DCM pointed out that many Guineans have been saying the same thing for more than a year, but the population has not in fact reacted, despite increasingly objectionable actions on the part of the government. Rabiadou at first agreed, saying that people have not been reacting because "someone goes through the neighborhood handing out sacks of rice and money, and then everyone calms down." When A/DCM suggested that this strategy would probably continue, if in fact true, Rabiadou said that the population will not accept to continue their suffering. Later, she said that Guinea's high illiteracy rate (more than 75%) means that people are poorly educated and do not fully understand the implications of their actions or the complexity of the country's political problems.

18. (C) Despite her continued affirmation of an eventual "popular reaction," Rabiadou stated that violence would not accomplish anything in Guinea. She said that people must work together to find a peaceful solution. According to Rabiadou, the population needs to join together to demand the president's resignation, but that a national labor strike is not the correct mechanism for making such a demand.

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INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY NEEDS TO INTERVENE  
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19. (S) Rabiadou was particularly critical of international institutions, including the U.S. Embassy. "People are

suffering and the international community is doing absolutely nothing, they just keep supporting the government. You keep saying that Guinea's problems must be solved by Guinea, but it is clear that we are unable to do so," she said. Rabiadou was convinced that nothing will move forward in Guinea as long as Conte remains in power. She pointed out that the president is seriously ill, but that he must be taking medicines that are imported from the west to treat his condition. "How hard would it be for you or France to tamper with those medicines, send them back to Conte, and end the problem right there?," she asked rhetorically.

¶10. (S) A Muslim, Rabiadou said that she has stopped going to mosque. She said that all of the imams are praying for the president's health, which she sees as hypocritical since they should be praying for exactly the opposite if they truly had the interests of the country and the population at heart.

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NO STRATEGY  
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¶11. (C) Several times during the discussion, A/DCM asked Rabiadou if the unions and other members of civil society have developed a strategy to deal with the situation, given her conviction that both elections and further labor strikes are unlikely to bring change. She did not have a clear answer. In the end, she said: "The situation is complicated and we are confused. We are trying to figure out what to do in order to avoid bloodshed. A strike is not an option. We need to make the population understand. We cannot wait for elections. The army is not the option. The power is in the streets."

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COMMENT  
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¶12. (C) Although she has been increasingly pessimistic in recent months, Rabiadou consistently advocates for peace. Her counterpart, Dr. Ibrahima Fofana, is more often in favor of a more aggressive approach, including a labor strike, as are many other union leaders. The unions clearly remain divided. Many of Rabiadou's comments suggest that she has lost hope and is not sure of how to move forward. She kept talking about an eventual popular reaction that would force the president to resign, but then later comments indicated that she may have some doubts about whether such a movement

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could actually come together.

¶13. (C) There is a growing sense among both international observers and domestic stakeholders alike that the unions are losing their popular support, as well as their influence. Their declining role likely stems from the continued divisions both between and within individual unions. However, if the unions come together to organize a national labor strike similar to the one in early 2007, it is possible that they could serve as a catalyst for a broader civil movement even if people don't necessarily support the unions or the strike itself. END COMMENT.  
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